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# Using youth-friendly communication approaches to communicate HIV/AIDS with young people is feasible and acceptable

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## Using youth-friendly communication approaches to communicate HIV/AIDS with young people is feasible and acceptable

*Key finding: Using a combination of innovative entertainment and educational materials and activities can stimulate young people's interest in HIV information, and increase knowledge*

HIV remains a major concern in Kenya among all segments of the population, including adolescents. New ways of delivering HIV information and services are therefore needed, especially to reach young people and encourage them to take up counselling and testing to know their sero-status. APHIA II Operations Research Project collaborated with the Ministry of Education, Well Told Story, and the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NASCOP) to implement a project to enhance communication in schools about HIV and create demand for early counselling and testing. The project also sought to create a supportive environment in schools for young people living with HIV by addressing stigma and discrimination and developing the capacity of school-based caregivers (school nurses, matrons and guidance and counselling teachers) on HIV care and support.

### The Intervention

Eight schools in Nairobi, with a total student population of 4,500 boys and girls, participated in the intervention. The intervention consisted of the following activities:

*Developing and distributing comic books:* Three editions of a comic book for students were developed and distributed to the participating schools between February and April 2011. The comic books were titled *Kuwa Shujaa* ('be a hero') and aimed to inspire students to be champions of positive behaviour. They were

based on role model characters, scenarios and locations familiar to the students. The first issue featured communication about HIV and AIDS, the second addressed the need for testing and counselling for HIV, while the third dealt with stigma and discrimination and their consequences on those who are exposed to them. Each edition of the comic books was accompanied by parents' and teachers' guides to assist them in talking about HIV and AIDS with their children/students. Colourful posters were also developed for use in classrooms and staff rooms. A total of 14,700 comic books, 6,900 teachers' guides, and 4,000 parents' guides were distributed to the schools

*Using role models and edutainment:* The project used two role models, a popular musician and an actor, to engage students in discussions about various HIV topics and emphasise the need to know one's status. The musician also staged musical performances at the schools during health talks, which were delivered by staff from NASCOP. A total of 13 edutainment events were conducted during the intervention period.

*Training of school-based care-givers:* To enable them to respond to HIV-related needs of students, school nurses, matrons and guidance and counselling teachers from the participating schools were trained in HIV care and support for young people. Seven care-givers were trained.

## Key findings

- *Majority of students exposed to intervention:* Of the students who participated in the endline survey, 84% had received at least one edition of the comic books. Of these, 87% thought the stories and messages were educative.
- *Students strongly need information on HIV and AIDS:* 82% and 79% of the students at baseline and endline respectively said they would like to receive information on HIV and AIDS. Over half would like information on how to avoid infection; other information needed include how to access treatment and care; how to live positively if infected and where to get tested; responsible sexual behaviour; sexual negotiation, and how to deal with sexual abuse and peer pressure.
- *Intervention led to increases in HIV knowledge:* Students who read the comic books had significantly higher levels of knowledge of modes of HIV infection than those who did not. For instance, 72% of students who obtained and read the comic books knew about HIV infection from mother to child, compared to 49% of those who did not.
- *Intervention led to more discussion about HIV counselling and testing:* The proportion of students who had discussed HIV testing and counselling with anyone was higher among those that had read the comic books (54%) than those who had not (44%).

Most of the discussions were with friends/classmates, parents/guardian and teachers.

- *Intervention led to increase in acceptability of HIV counselling and testing:* The proportions of students who said that they would accept testing, counselling or test results were significantly higher at endline among those who had read the comic books than among those who did not. Forty-seven percent of students who had read the comics also reported that their fear of getting tested for HIV had reduced.
- *Intervention led to reduced sexual activity:* The proportion of students who had sex within the previous one month before the endline survey was lower among those that had read the comic books (25%) than among those who had not (35%).

## Recommendations:

- Young people in schools have great need for HIV and AIDS information. The Ministry of Education and its partners should devise ways of providing this information through age-appropriate channels.
- Using youth-friendly communication materials and approaches to communicate HIV and AIDS information is feasible and acceptable to students. Programmes should explore using more innovative approaches to reach young people, to reduce boredom and stimulate interest in the information delivered.

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Source: Obare, F, H Birungi et al. 2011. *Feasibility of using youth-friendly channels to communicate HIV and AIDS messages to in-school young people in Kenya*. APHIA II OR Project Report. Population Council, Kenya

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